



Feminism in Shashi Deshpande's Novel 'That Long Silence'

S. Hannah Evangeline

Ph.D., Research Scholar, Part-Time 'C' Category External, Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli, Tamilnadu, India.

Received 30th September 2014, Accepted 28th November 2014

Abstract

Feminism has always meant independence of mind and spirit and body. Feminist effort to end patriarchal domination should be primary concern precisely because it insists on the eradication and oppression in the family context and in all other intimate relationships. Its theory is that men and women should be equal politically, economically and socially. It is difficult for a common man to understand female psyche in totality: so the fight was fought by feminist to have clear understanding and expression of female psyche. Feminism as movement might have originated in the West but with the deterioration in the status of women in India and the subsequent efforts made during the freedom struggle to pave the way for equal access to education and equal status, there arose a need for feminist studies. Some of the issues evoked by the Western women were bound to be taken up by their Indian counterparts. Shashi Deshpande derives the title of her novel 'That Long Silence' from the classic understatement by Elizabeth Robins made in speech to a world body. That Long Silence comes relatively close to real life experience. The novel achieves greater credibility from the fact that Jaya, the Protagonist, is a very well-read person, possessing a literary sensitivity which corresponds with her fictional role. Deshpande may not be a formal feminist in strict scene of the word, but it must also be observed that feminism can mean different things to different people. In That Long Silence, the writer has presented this phenomenon through the character of Jaya, who is known by two names: Jaya and Suhasini. Jaya, which means victory, is the name given by her father when she was born, and Suhasini, the name given after her marriage which means a "soft, smiling, placid, motherly woman. In the Indian context, once a girl gets married to a man, whether it be a love marriage or an arranged one, the husband takes complete control over her. Whether the husband follows the right path or wrong one, she has to blindly follow in his footsteps. Due to her sensitive nature, Jaya is very particular about moulding her tastes in order to suit those of the rest even if her superior intellect is not satisfied.

Keywords: Feminism, Independence, the Long Silence.

© Copy Right, IJRRAS, 2014. All Rights Reserved.

Introduction

Feminism has always meant independence of mind and spirit and body. Feminist effort to end patriarchal domination should be primary concern precisely because it insists on the eradication and oppression in the family context and in all other intimate relationships. Its theory is that men and women should be equal politically, economically and socially. It is difficult for a common man to understand female psyche in totality: so the fight was fought by feminist to have clear understanding and expression of female psyche. Feminism as movement might have originated in the West but with the deterioration in the status of women in India and the subsequent efforts made during the freedom struggle to pave the way for equal access to education and equal status, there arose a need for feminist studies. Some of the issues evoked by the Western women were bound to be taken up by their Indian counterparts.

Feminism is an ideological position which emphasizes the equality of gender and advocates maximization of potential of women, so that institutionally and culturally created constraints do not hinder process and pattern of development of women. Most urban English-Speaking Indians are familiar with the word 'feminism, but their understanding of it remains vague and there is a general rejection of its relevance to the Indian context. Patriarchal-religious traditions of India and overt or covert conservative super-structures have kept it from becoming a widely apprehended phenomenon. There is still a tendency to perceive it as the result of 'moral corruption' of women imitating 'foreign' or 'western' trends, arising from their unrestrained freedom and leading to promiscuous sexual behavior. A critical analysis of the Indian situation would make it apparent that the aims of 'Indian feminism' should lie in the spread of education, economic self-sufficiency, preservation of human rights and in the awareness of the desire for liberation from mythical and social values which constrain women as well as men: socially, psychically and physically. Such ideas of emancipation or in other words 'feminism' are tentatively prevalent

Correspondence

S.Hannah Evangeline,
E-mail: hannahpeter07@gmail.com, Ph. +9197897 65021

only in the elitist masses that have had the privilege of education develop attention and concentration and stimulate the creative abilities that are latent within the child. (Swami Kuvalayananda, 1977)

Feminism in ‘That Long Silence’

Shashi Deshpande derives the title of her novel ‘That Long Silence’ from the classic understatement by Elizabeth Robins made in speech to a world body. That Long Silence comes relatively close to real life experience. The novel achieves greater credibility from the fact that Jaya, the Protagonist, is a very well-read person, possessing a literary sensitivity which corresponds with her fictional role.

Mohan, Jaya’s husband in That Long Silence, is a typical Indian husband who takes his wife’s unflinching support for granted. When threatened with charges of corruption, he expects his wife to follow him into hiding without a murmur of protest. He does not mind using his wife as a crutch in his hour of crisis and the slightest hint of deviation from her role of a subservient wife is enough to provoke a terrifying outburst with which he walks out of the home. Deshpande also shows how Jaya herself is to be blamed for the state of her marriage. Jaya realizes how she had all along followed her Vanita mami’s advice that a husband is like a ‘sheltering tree which must be kept alive at any cost because without the tree alive flourishing even if you have to water it with deceit and lies.

That long silence is a autobiographical account of jaya, a gifted writer, whose talent lies smothered under the disapproval of her husband. Jaya seeks to erase the long silence by giving an honest and frank account of the conditions which lead to her failure as a writer and the constraints of society which result in the suppression of herself as an individual. Deshpande may not be a formal feminist in strict scene of the word, but it must also be observed that feminism can mean different things to different people. Arshia Sattar in her thought-provoking article on the position of the feminist movement at present observes: “Feminism is no longer a single voice that speaks for all women irrespective of creed and colour. It is rather a ‘rainbow coalition’ of rights, desires, agendas, struggles, victories. Not all issues apply to all women, our battles need not be the same and, more and more, we tend to speak for ourselves rather than for all of us.

Feminism is a social, political and literacy movement that strives to discard all forms of domination and unequal treat of women so as to bring a well-balanced and harmonious society. It advocates the right of women as individuals. It opposes all forms of relegation of women to the margin, and aims at reforming the existing social structure that enhances male supremacy and femal domination. In that Long Silence, Deshpande has potrayed the irony of a women writer who is also a young house wife.being a writer she

is supposed to present her views and ideas before the society but still she remains silent probing into her past, struggling with her present and trying to establish a rapport with her future. She is an intellectual who finds herself out of place in the society meant only for men.

Generally, a woman’s identify is defined by others, in terms of her relationship with men etc. The questions “what a woman does ‘is never asked, but “who shed belongs to ‘ is always considered important. She doesn’t have her identify of her own. Her name keeps on changing according to the wished of others. In That Long Silence, the writer has presented this phenomenon through the character of Jaya, who is known by two names: Jaya and Suhasini. Jaya, which means victory, is the name given by her father when she was born, and Suhasini, the name given after her marriage which means a “soft, smiling, placid, motherly woman. “Both the names symbolize the traits of her personality. The former symbolizes revolt and the latter submission. The dreams of her childhood, to change the ascribed situation of woman resulting in achieving her goals are shattered by the environment, the surroundings, and above all by the society which imposed all sorts of restriction on women. She is absolutely helpless and is unable to do anything to improve her situation. Ultimately, she tries to adapt herself to the main current. She longs to be called an ideal wife. She revolt in silence. She comments on a situation when her husband talks about women being treated very cruelly by their husbands and he calls it “strength”. “He saw strength in the woman sitting silently in front of the fire, but I saw despair. I saw a despair so great that it would not voice itself. I saw a struggle so bitter that silence was the only weapon Silence and Surrender”.

Conclusion

In the Indian context, once a girl get married to a man, whether it be a love marriage or an arranged one, the husband takes complete control over her. Whether the husband follows the right path or wrong one, she has to blindly follow in his footsteps. Social conformity has always been more obligatory for a woman than for a man. Generally, a woman’s identify tends to be defined by others. Due to her sensitive nature, Jaya is very particular about moulding her tastes in order to suit those of the rest even if her superior intellect is not satisfied. In the very beginning of the novel, we see that she tries to reason out with her father as to why she should not listen to the songs broadcast on the radio, but ultimately she keeps silent, suppressing her desire. Here, Deshpande has presented the theme of lack of communication.

Reference

1. The Novels of Shashi Deshpande By Sarabjit k.Sandhu.
2. A Feminist Perspective on the novels of Shashi Deshpande By Y.S. Sunita Reddy.